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TAGS: PGOV PREL SA

SUBJECT: TRIBAL LEADERS MAKE AMENDS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: Saudi press this week covered what is likely a regular, but nonetheless rarely reported event, the traditional process of reconciliation between two tribes engaged in a potentially violent dispute. Though such events are usually far from the local headlines and almost never the subject of national-level discourse, the news reports of this reconciliation provide a welcome view of traditional local control and mechanisms for resolving conflicts that might otherwise spin out of control. In this case, tribal leaders in southern Saudi Arabia reconciled after a dispute between two school-aged boys. Following a series of talks with tribal leadership delegations, amends were made with the swearing of oaths and the payment of 5,000 Riyals by the tribe whose members were found to be at fault. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** (U) Mainstream media reported a recent reconciliation in the southern regions of the Kingdom, where the al-Sultan and al-Shabnan, sub-tribes of the large Qahtan tribal confederation, ended a dispute started by two teenage boys at a local intermediate school. The student from the al-Sultan tribe reportedly initiated a fight with a student from the al-Shabnan tribe. That fight escalated into a dispute between the two tribes, which threatened to become violent.

**¶3.** (U) To resolve the conflict, each tribe sent a leadership delegation to participate in dialogue. After several rounds of discussions between the delegations, the tribes agreed to reconcile following the payment of 5,000 Riyals from the al-Sultan to the al-Shabnan tribe and a swearing of oaths by the two senior tribal leaders of the al-Sultan tribe. The senior leaders took an oath, administered by a local religious leader, swearing that the brawl between the two boys took place without their knowledge and without their encouragement. This oath swearing ceremony marked the end of the conflict between the tribes.

**¶4.** (C) COMMENT: In the past, representatives of the Royal Family would traditionally step in and pay the compensation ("blood money") for the offending tribe, often well in excess of the traditional amount, in order to prevent violent retribution. This particular reconciliation reportedly occurred without significant political or financial involvement of the Royal Family, and the requisite compensation was a small amount. Despite the apparent lack of visible, direct Royal Family involvement, it is likely that the local governor or other representative of Riyadh made clear to tribal leaders that what was apparently a school yard incident was to stay in the school yard and not escalate further.

END COMMENT.

OBERWETTER